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ABSTRACT

Currently there is a growing realization that the schools are only one part of a larger network of learning environments important to effective education. Six societal conditions have encouraged a dialogue that is redefining the role of the school: the fragmented associations among all the educating institutions (family, mass media, schools, peer groups, church, and so forth), criticism of the school as an institution, the shrinking financial resources available to support the schools, fluctuations in the student population, the limited success of the schools in serving groups that have been marginal to the society, and the changing labor market. The boundaries of educating institutions should be permeable and educators should lead in establishing connections among institutions that share the responsibility for educating. This outreach can begin with the family, the mass media, and the workplace. Before responsibilities can be shifted, education must be defined, goals for all the institutions established, and the nature of the curricula determined. Building a coordinated system of public education that spans several settings may prove to be the educator's greatest future challenge. (Author/IRT)

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EXPANDING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING:

THE MAKING AND BREAKING OF LEARNING BOUNDARIES

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EXPANDING ENVIRONMENTS FOR LEARNING:
THE MAKING AND BREAKING OF LEARNING BOUNDARIES

There is a sense of urgency building as educators join in a search for the changing role of the school in contemporary society. Throughout the country educators are starting to take inventory of what schools can do and should do. This effort is picking up momentum and what has always been known is becoming more readily acknowledged--schools are a necessary yet single part of a larger network of learning environments that are important for effective education.

We believe that American education is entering a "period of inclusion", characterized by increased use of nonschool environments for encouraging desired learning. In simple terms, more attention will be given to including what happens to learners outside of school as part of the curriculum. Building a coordinated curriculum that spans several settings may prove to be one of the persistent problems in the future. The major purpose of this paper, then, is to suggest directions for deliberate and constructive collaboration between schools and other educational agents. Professional educators know that learning takes place through direct experiences provided in and beyond school settings. We think the challenges of the next decades will be met by a productive system of educational environments that better connects school and nonschool learning.

Societal Conditions

The tension calling for a re-thinking of the school's responsibilities is generated, in part, by societal conditions that are likely to have an impact on altering the reality of school programs. The aim here is not to conduct a comprehensive analysis of all societal demands. Rather, the intention is to make clear that the current concern about incorporating the educating potential of nonschool environments as a deliberate part of the curriculum is a result of pressures from outside the school. Six societal conditions that encourage a spirited dialogue about the school's changing role are now considered.

- Fragmented Association Among Educating Institutions

The primary educating institutions of contemporary life--the family, the media, the school, the peer group, the religious setting, the workplace, and so on--do not seem to work together in a coherent, organized learning system. Indeed, the configuration of education that served us adequately and, in some way, admirably for a century (with the school at its center and the family, church and local community as its supporting branches) is now fragmented and in some disarray. The parts of the system too often function at cross purposes. Further, the position of the school in this configuration is obscured by the rise of different agents for learning and sources of knowledge. For example, popular literature, newspapers, magazines, radio, movies, telephones, records, and expanded travel

opportunities opened up more ways of gaining information, skills and attitudes than were previously available in a self-contained community in the early part of this century. Service professions also proliferated, providing instruction in every conceivable aspect of daily life that duplicate or supplant the offerings of traditional schools. Also, with the advent of television, the peer group, and the workplace as active agents providing opportunitites for learning, the demands for change within the learning system are accelerated. In short, the resurgence of interest in the responsibilities of schools has emerged when the role of the school within an expanding configuration of educating institutions was gradually changing.[1]

● Criticism of the School As An Institution

The questioning of what schools are for is taking place in response to criticisms that come from varied quarters in society: conservatives, humanists, neo-Rousseauian "de-schoolers" and neo-Marxists.[2] The combined criticisms carry a freight of unmet expectations, bringing again to the fore the school's symbolic role in the American dream. Americans invest so much hope in the institution to which we send our children. We delegate increasing responsibilities to schools that conflict with and prevent completion of other educational responsibilities, then criticize the institution for not fulfilling all our wishes. The school's successes and failures do not occur in a social vacuum. As Cremin points out, where the public school has succeeded, it has functioned as part of a network

of education that usually included family and church, all committed to similar or complementary values, all functioning with agreed-upon divisions of responsibilities.[3] Hence, the source of criticism that unmistakably surrounds the school's search for its role in society is responsible for much of the tone of this quest.

- Shrinking Financial Resources Available to Support Schools

When funds are short and cuts have to be made, educators and citizens must think carefully about what educational role should be filled by schools. Faced with the prospect of higher taxes to support schools, taxpayers also inquire more deeply into the value of the educational product they receive for their investment. But the financial crunch is acute because many of the societal supports that added value to the local school are disappearing. As the mobility of families and school staffs increases, the school can no longer turn for financial support to the multi-generational family that used to live in the same community, attend the neighborhood school, and support trusted teachers. Shrinking resources, then, force the examinations of purposes in a particularly uncomfortable fashion for the schools.

- Fluctuations of Student Population

The contraction of the student population, as the crests of the last baby boom cohorts passed, called the cards of those who promoted expanding the responsibilities of the school. The previous

growth of the student population seemed such a sure bet that educators and legislators tied funding levels to it. After all, schooling expanded steadily through the first three quarters of the present century. Unfortunately, growth assumptions about getting bigger, not necessarily better, pervaded the planners' thinking. It was irresistible, then, when the population decreased and the funds grew short, not to think in terms of "decline" in a qualitative sense, as well. What were the purposes of education, many asked themselves, if additional programs and services could no longer be created?

- Limited Success of the School As Serving Formerly Marginal Groups

The school's purposes are challenged by the fact that educators are only partially successful with students from the margins of society--those who had long been held at a distance by political and social means, those who suffered from a variety of physical, mental or emotional handicaps, or those who for a variety of reasons were less ready for what the school had to offer and hence more difficult to teach.[4] Although an initial reaction is to blame the people forced to the margins for the problem, inevitably the organization and ultimately the purposes of the school have to be investigated in light of the school's avowed commitment to provide equal educational opportunity for all.

- Changing Nature of the Labor Market

Self-questioning by educators was made unavoidable by the inexorable direction of changes in the organization of production. With increasing technological complexity, growing automation and continual consolidation of smaller firms into multi-national concerns, the unskilled and self-employed labor markets have nearly disappeared. This makes the old educational "outs" of ignoring, failing, or expelling particularly those at the margins look like cruel courses of action because it is increasingly more difficult to leave school and enter the labor market. Hence, the so-called sorting function of schools became obviously problematic in light of the dead-end alternatives facing those who complete schooling but do not have an opportunity to join the work force.

These six societal conditions, among others, demand that we reach a clearer understanding of what schools are for. Of course, cracks in the configuration of education follow fault-lines appearing throughout American society and culture. For when the purposes of schools come into question, fundamental issues are being raised about our shared images of a good life and our hopes for our children and society. Yet, as these problematic issues come into focus, it is also a promising time for the reformulation of practice that must accompany institutional improvement.[5]

Improvement and Shared Responsibility

Improvements in educational practice can be gained during these times of uncertainty and reduced resources. As noted above, concerns about ends of education resurface as social conditions change. These concerns will generate a series of decisions throughout the next decades, but their long term consideration and far-reaching nature should not inhibit us from beginning to formulate plans to put into practice.

What direction will school improvement take in the 1980's? It is our position that public elementary and secondary schools can become more effective by strengthening their relations with other institutions that are educationally important. This is part of the answer to determining the directions for reconstruction of schools in the United States. Like a person coping with identity issues who creates a more coherent personal direction by turning resolutely to form deliberately chosen relations and commitments with other people and enterprises, educators in schools should develop a more effective curriculum by forming more purposeful associations with other educating institutions now poorly coordinated with the learning agenda of the school. In our view, this period of asking what schools are for should merge into a period of inclusion and experimentation in which educators form partnerships with parents, community leaders, media representatives, business people and elected officials. These partnerships would combine in a more powerful way the educational processes and resources that are influential in the lives of learners.

As consensus grows concerning the appropriate distribution of educational responsibilities among institutions, a more compelling and better coordinated arrangement of educational environments can be constructed.

The boundaries between educating institutions must be permeable rather than closed, and educators should lead in establishing the connecting fibers between schools and other institutions that can share the responsibility for promoting learning. Constructive associations among educating institutions will help more people by opening optional avenues for learning other than those provided by the over-extended schools. For example, some adolescents impatient with abstract classroom learning might learn with a greater sense of responsibility and pride through on-the-job apprenticeships. Also, communication and constructive action across boundaries can build continuity between what is learned in each setting. In language development, where children have their first and possibly most persuasive learning in a family setting, it may be that teachers have to more directly engage the parents as instructors and seek to extend, complement or refine what is being taught in the home. Further, by developing with their students an awareness of additional environments for learning and an ability to benefit from these other sources of instruction on their own, educators can empower individuals to choose and design their own programs of continuous learning across various institutions. Finally, by establishing more constructive associations, educators can contribute to improvement of their own and other institutions. If this stage of mutual responsibility is reached,

consideration of the purposes of education and the responsibilities of multiple institutions for learning will have contributed to institutional renewal throughout the society.

The First Partners: Family, Media, and Workplace.

We suggest that outreach by educators begin with three key educating institutions: the family, the media and the workplace. Within each type of institution are specific conditions that must be respected, yet general reasons for selecting each starting place can be identified.

As the primary educators, parents, relatives and siblings create together a sustained and intense family learning environment which influences the young child's development during formative stages of growth. Even as the school, the media and the peer group interact with the home setting, members of the family continue to filter and interpret these other educational influences, mediating their impact on the learner through actions that are repeated or elaborated daily. Parents typically seek a controlling role in selecting and orchestrating outside educational influences for their children. The interest of parents in their children's growth and development is intense, creating a natural point of entry for educators to improve family decisions about learning opportunities at home or in the community. When educators can utilize the wisdom taught in families to challenge young minds, and when families can turn their considerable interpretive and screening powers to support and extend the social and academic teachings of schools, a powerful force for children's learning will have been created.

As potentially our next most important partners, representatives of the mass media (including cinema, television, radio, newspapers, magazines) also must be approached by educators. After all, television alone currently outranks the schools "in terms of size of operation and audience, in the amount of time and intensity of interest devoted by that audience, and in the diversity of its course content."[6] We have much to learn from the media professionals, as well as much to teach them about our craft.

As a partner with schools for attracting a learner's attention to agreed-upon content, the media would bring undeniable strengths. Participation with media is voluntary, whereas school attendance is currently compulsory until sixteen. The media emphasizes drama and humor, exciting visual and auditory effects, simultaneous transmission of current events, and sensational exploitation of taboo topics; while at present the schools emphasize printed materials, a limited range of verbal teaching techniques, and conventional, sometimes outdated content. Further, media requires a minimum of social restrictions (for example, television requires no one else to play and costs less than a penny per hour to operate), whereas the school environment requires mostly group-oriented behaviors.

These troubling comparisons suggest strengths the schools can incorporate through successful partnership with cable TV companies, radio networks, and movie houses. Media representatives, however, also need to learn from educators about the dangerous human consequences of pleasures gained through entertainment received without effort and accepted without guided thought. The media must also consider the

experience educators have with children to understand the impact of exposure to taboo topics like violence, complicated sexual and emotional relationships, or the effect of idealized material fantasies on unprepared or inexperienced youth. Further, the media can add to its repertoire much of what educators have learned about active learning, the process of inquiry, or the exploration of alternative explanations. For just as the schools need lessons in making learning more exciting, so the media needs lessons in stimulating social responsibility and commitment to participation in common enterprises. Yet, when the media are brought more carefully into the educational and socialization systems employed by families and schools, another powerful force for children will have been created.

Further, educators and representatives of various workplaces can probe their existing relationships to identify points of productive collaboration. As Cremin notes, "Every employer has a curriculum which he teaches deliberately and systematically over time. The curriculum includes not only the technical skills of typing or welding or reaping or teaching, but also the social skills carrying out those activities in concert with others on given time schedules and according to established expectations and routines."[7] In our view of the relationship between schools and work, the schools have increasingly overemphasized a narrow vocational theme. Indeed, Americans have been witness over the last 75 years to an emerging consensus "that public schools are important as economic instrumentalities, deriving integrity and meaning from the ways in which they prepare students for participation in the

labor market rather than from the ways that they inform the exercise of critical intelligence or moral and civic consciousness."[8]

The preference for technical over intellectual learning has created a false standard for judging the school curriculum in terms of its contribution to the learning of marketable skills. Paradoxically, this has occurred at the very time that businesses and professions are recognizing that they can do a better job of training employees than the schools. Xerox and McDonalds, just like hospitals, assembly lines and the military, develop their own colleges or training programs for efficient training of employees. What these workplaces require of schools is to provide the human ingredients, the intellectual and social structures on which training in the corporate and technological world can build.

It is our position that schools and workplaces should examine their respective curricula and interests to identify parts of the curriculum that would be desirable for the school to relinquish and for the workplace to absorb. This does not imply a complete either/or relationship. It means that there will be some learning that can best take place in the work setting (study and practice of tasks from the real world of work); some learning that can best take place in the schools (fundamental reading and writing skills); and some learning that should be collaboratively attempted (honing of communication skills or practice in problem-solving). Of course, this is the same balance that must be sought with other institutions that educate. The point is that we are proposing the educators as initiators of this new

configuration of education, and the family, the media and the workplace as the most compelling partners for learning.

Making and Breaking the Boundaries for Learning

The responsibilities of schools are difficult to redefine or transfer to other groups, and distressing to eliminate entirely. Responsibilities are often accepted as goals (both appropriately and inappropriately) in reaction to the efforts of many diverse groups whose interests prevailed over others, and then persisted on the agenda.[9] It has proven nearly impossible to clearly conceptualize the total range of existing responsibilities, because of the overlapping and sometimes inconsistent nature of these responsibilities, and because of the ongoing ideological efforts of their various advocates. Yet, in this period of our history major institutions like the schools (one could easily add the government, the health care system and the criminal justice system) must rethink their purposes and redistribute their functions if the quality of life is to improve. This reconstruction of the schools will again be a sociopolitical process. We advance here three key topics on which a consensus should be sought to guide purposeful reconstruction of public education in schools and community. The three topics to head the agenda are: definition of education, priority goals for schools and for other institutions that educate, and the nature of the curriculum in various institutions.

First, there can be no serious consideration of what schools are for without simultaneously considering what education is.[10] It will not be easy to reach back to first principles here, since (as Illich warned) many have identified education with schooling and in the process defined

education as a commodity produced by books, teachers and schools.[11] The fatal temptation is simply to examine the existing norms and tools of the school and extrapolate only from these regularities to the goals and definition of the educational enterprise. The circular nature of this reasoning is evident, as are the constraints such reasoning would place on the reconstruction of public education.

Defining education without reference to the image of the school is quite difficult. Cremin has found it useful to define education as the "deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities, as well as any outcome of that effort."[12] His definition stresses an intentional effort, and incorporates cognitive, affective and psychomotor learnings. Also, it is narrower than the processes called socialization or enculturation, although inclusive of several of the same elements. His definition suggests that education is conducted in many settings, and does not preclude the fact that learning can occur in incidental ways.

John Dewey defined education in related terms, but shifted the emphasis from the point of view of the provider to the experiences of the learning individual. For Dewey, education was a process of becoming, one with the rhythms of individual growth. Education was conceptualized as the ongoing reconstruction or reorganization of experience. Dewey was interested (as is Cremin) in fostering the learner's desire for further educational growth, and in empowering the individual to know and to seek what is required for ongoing growth.[13]

This review of two related definitions illustrates the importance

of developing an overall definition of education as a starting point for deciding how to redistribute educational responsibilities. An emerging definition of education might include: consideration of the nature of the "transmission" efforts (instruction) as well as the "acquisition" efforts (learning), consideration of types of content, and consideration of the balance between uniquely individual growth and common social needs. The wider the definition of education opens, the further it moves from any neat ends-means purposes for schools or other institutions. As for Dewey, the individual learner would become the focal point for a broad array of educational institutions. The narrower we define education, the more likely it will be that responsibilities will be converted into objectives that will predominate what we permit ourselves to seek for our children. The school is likely to remain the major institution for encouraging others to lead in responsible directions for quality education. Yet, on a community by community basis, we will have to ask ourselves with renewed urgency, "What is the education we want for our children?" While it is unlikely that a simple and neat academic definition will be agreed upon, the pursuit of the question is a more productive enterprise than simply chastising the schools for not providing it.

A second topic for dialogue is to consider which educational goals should be accomplished by the schools, which goals by other institutions (family, media, the workplace, etc.), and which goals should be shared. A reasonable starting point for the

selection of goals would be to develop a list based on a definition of education. The list would be in a form not unlike that prepared by John Goodlad and his colleagues in the early stages of A Study of Schooling.[14] They synthesized goals for schooling articulated by state and local boards of education, various special commissions, and others into a list of twelve general goals and sixty-five descriptive objectives. The twelve goals stated in topical form included:

1. Basic Skills
2. Career/Vocational Education
3. Intellectual Development
4. Enculturation
5. Interpersonal Relations
6. Autonomy
7. Citizenship
8. Creativity and Aesthetic Perception
9. Self-Concept
10. Emotional and Physical Well-Being
11. Moral and Ethical Character
12. Self-Realization

Clearly, these goals (which represent a useful summary of current goals for schooling in the United States) could be analyzed in terms of the responsibilities of various institutions. For argument's sake, let's extend this analysis in a hypothetical way, continuing to assume that these twelve goals are associated with a definition of education. After deliberate discussions, a particular community might construct a chart like the following:

EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN OUR COMMUNITY

GOALS	INSTITUTIONS						
	SCHOOLS	FAMILY	MEDIA	WORKPLACE	CULTURAL/ RECREATIONAL	GOVERNMENT	CHURCH
Basic Skills	*	o	o				
Career/Vocational		*	o	*		o	
Intellectual Development	*	o	*		o		
Enculturation	*	*	o		o		*
Interpersonal Relationship	o	*	o	*	o		*
Autonomy	o	*		*		o	o
Citizenship	o	o	*	o		*	o
Creativity/Aesthetics	*	o	*		*		
Self-Concept	o	*	o	o	o		*
Emotional/Physical	o	*		*	*		o
Moral/Ethical	o	*	*	o		o	*
Self-Realization	o	*		*	o		*

* = Major Responsibility
o = Minor Responsibility

On this chart, all goals are shared in a major or minor way across institutions. The primary institutions which educate are the family, the church, the workplace, the media and the schools. The school has four major priorities (Basic Skills, Intellectual Development,

Enculturation and Creativity/Aesthetic Perception); whereas the family has eight major goals. The church and the workplace each has five major goals, while the media assumes four.

Our purpose here is not to debate this division of responsibilities, but to advance this topic of shared responsibility as a key one and to illustrate constructive results of dialogue about this issue. In the course of this dialogue, the validity of propositions such as the following two Goodlad has suggested could be scrutinized: "Schools should concentrate solely on the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and sensibilities that require for their cultivation in the individual deliberate, systematic and sustained effort. . . The school . . . should take on only those social purposes that can be converted easily and naturally into educational goals and activities."[15]

Third, the nature of the curriculum in various institutions is a worthy topic for dialogue. For once people consider the possibility of the school sharing major educational responsibilities, the nature of curriculum could be liberated from the current overemphasis on specific subject matter organized in courses with lists of objectives and officially adopted content in the form of printed materials. Too often curriculum was created for an information-poor society, where children obtained most of their information from direct exposure in a relatively small family, neighborhood and community context. The curriculum was the community's gateway to information and schools were the source of, monitor over, and guide to books.

Increasingly, children grow into an information-rich world,

in which a competitive and wide-open communicative structure can undermine or strengthen most attempts by the family and school to shape the child's cognitive world and values through a careful selection of curriculum content. The world of youth today is increasingly action-poor, and the experiential groundwork for developing responsibility that once came from helping run the household or other productive family enterprises has eroded dramatically.[16] Under these conditions, curriculum emphases must shift toward providing more opportunities for young learners to reflect upon, probe and reinterpret their perceptions of the information they receive from many sources. Learners will also need a curriculum designed to integrate their experiences through active participation in socially productive roles outside the family and the school; and to develop coping skills appropriate to the complexity of problem-solving and decision-making in an information-rich, yet resource-limited, society. In a way, the "curriculum" will become synonymous with a deliberately shaped environment for learning[17] designed for various community settings, rather than a predetermined content or "style".[18] Similarly, in the future, "school" may come to include the education received by learners in various institutions, rather than simply connoting a single place where youth are segregated to be taught.

Closing

The forces of society that resulted in proliferation of purposes for schools also brought about a re-examination of what schools are for. We argue that educators are entering a period of introspection marked

by spirited and constructive dialogue about what schools do and what they should do. This paper contributes to the mounting dialogue by suggesting that the burden of societal responsibilities delegated to the schools be increasingly questioned and the educational role of other institutions in the community be acknowledged. Now the search is for ways to build a truly "public" education system. This system would be a network of purposeful learning environments, designed for the accomplishment of desirable objectives, each with clear responsibilities and each interrelated in productive ways with the others.

The expansion of learning environments into other institutions should not result in schools being forced to the margins of the newly formed education enterprise. We believe that schools will be at the center of effective education. Yet, the identity of the schools is being challenged by the movement toward a more educative society. A defensive posture at this time would be counter-productive. Rather, we think it necessary to encourage a quality dialogue by working to insure that important concerns about expanding environments for learning head the agenda. This dialogue and eventual decision-making demands an understanding of the concerns addressed in this paper:[19] namely, the forces that are encouraging a re-examination of the purposes of schools, the possible benefits of shared responsibilities, and the possible ways institutional boundaries can be altered to expand environments for learning.

Building a coordinated system of public education to span several settings may prove to be the educator's greatest challenge in the future. Indeed, both the theory and practice of education is likely to be advanced by strengthening the relation of various educative institutions to one another and to society at large.[20] We think the examination of the purposes of schools will result in the realization that constructive collaboration can become a necessary and rewarding way of life for educators and for those they serve. Our schools have been thrust into a time for introspection. One meaningful way to emerge is to enter a period of inclusion by expanding environments for learning. What remains to be seen is what leadership educators will provide to the formation of the coming educative society.

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[4]Ibid., p. 86.

[5]Ibid., p. 53.

[6]Herbert J. Gans, "The Mass Media as An Educational Institution," Television Quarterly 6, no. 2 (Spring 1976), p. 20.

[7]Cremin, op. cit., p. 22.

[8]Barbara Finkelstein, "Private Conflicts in Public Schools: The Sabotage of Educative Possibilties." The Phi Delta Kappa, Spring 1981, p. 327.

[9]As Goodlad notes, historically four general categories of goals for schools have emerged sequentially in the United States: academic goals, vocational goals, social and civic goals, and personal goals. John I. Goodlad, What Schools Are For (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa, 1979), p. 44.

[10]Ibid., p. 38.

[11]Similarly, many view wealth as a commodity produced by chemicals, doctors and hospitals.

[12]Cremin, op. cit., p. 27.

[13]For an expanded discussion of the definition of education, see Goodlad, op. cit., Chapter 3.

[14]Ibid., pp. 46-52.

[15]Ibid., p. 106.

[16]James S. Coleman, "The Children Have Outgrown the Schools," in James Bowman, et al., editors Of Education and Human Community: A Symposium of Leaders in Experimental Education (Lincoln, Nebraska: Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, University of Nebraska, 1972), pp. 69-77.

[17]For an expanded discussion of the meaning of curriculum, see "Curriculum as Environments for Learning: A Practical Meaning and Model," ERIC Access #170 221, 1979.

[18]For a discussion of an educational style, see Hope Jensen Leichter, Families and Communities as Educators. Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 246 pp.

[19]Of course there are many additional concerns that will sharpen the discussions and actions about these topics. Some of these concerns include: a) exploring the roles of various community settings in the socialization of children; b) deciding on government policy for financing learning in nonschool settings; c) developing technology and programs for storage and retrieval of academic information; d) researching the effectiveness of school-community partnerships that provide educational services; e) preparing educational personnel for working in institutions other than schools; f) renewing nonschool settings so that oppressive conditions growing from their central missions are assessed in light of their newly acquired educational responsibilities; and g) improving equality in education by expanding environments for learning into additional institutions that have educational importance.

[20]Cremin, op. cit., p. 23.